

Your story is ready to take shape and movement!

The principle of stop-motion animation, as described in the previous episodes, is that of putting together many photographs and then reproducing them one after the other at high speed so that you get a magical effect of movement of the elements photographed.

In every picture you take there are elements that remain fixed, such as the background, and others, such as the characters, that move slowly in every single shot.

The construction of the characters in your story will therefore have to take into account the various movements that they will have to make in all the photos you take, to give the impression of coming to life.

For this reason, it is important that the construction of a character, whatever its nature (person, animal, plant or object) and its movement, are dealt with together, as they are both the fundamental part of a stop-motion animation.

Characters and materials

How do you build a character in a stop-motion story and what are the most suitable materials to make it?

It is not possible to give a precise answer to these questions, fortunately! The construction and creation of characters and props is perhaps the most fascinating and fun part of the animation. You can give complete freedom to your imagination and creativity.

A few practical tips might come in handy, though.

A first aspect to keep in mind is the position of the backdrop on which you decide to move your characters. If you're working on a vertical surface, it's important that your character's structure is solid enough to keep it standing, but at the same time, flexible enough to allow it to make easy movements. In this case, you could make a skeleton out of steel or aluminum wire, and then cover it with plasticine or cotton and fabric, as in our animator's example. If the surface is horizontal, your characters will be stretched out and you can use softer materials, or even paper.

When making a character, it is also important to keep in mind that it will communicate not only through words and dialogue, but also through expressions and movements.

As shown by Claude in the example with the characters of My Life as a Courgette, you only need to slightly change the position of mouth and eyes to convey joy, or sadness, to the viewer. Some parts of your character can then remain the same throughout the story, and only by changing a few small details can you enrich your story so much.

Of course, colors, clothes, body size or certain distinctive signs are also essential to get the message you want to convey in your story.

An important element in the construction of a character is also the material. Here, too, you can give free rein to your creativity.

You can build three-dimensional characters with plasticine, or with toys you already own, with pieces of wood or with any other object you find around you. But you can also create an animation with two-dimensional characters, in which case you could, for example, use cardboard, newspaper clippings, or even sand.

In terms of materials, we remind you that your story will have to talk about ecology or the relationship with nature. These aspects can also be recalled by the materials you use, such as recycled newspaper, old bottles that can come to life thanks to your character, or you could take a trip to the mountains, lake or to the park near your home and take inspiration from the natural elements around you. What do you think, for example, of a story starring Mr. Pinecone and Mrs. Cob?

Movement and timing

How should characters move on stage? And how fast?

Timing, in relation to the movement of the characters, is a very important factor in the world of animation.

As already mentioned, each shot and each photograph capture a single movement of the elements on stage.

At the same time, and therefore in the same photo shoot, different movements can also be represented, such as a person talking while a bird is flying fast in the sky and a dog is quietly walking in the grass. All these elements can have very different timings, and consequently different speeds, and this depends on the width of the movement between one shot and the next.

It might sound like a difficult concept, but it's actually a very simple thing to do and also a lot of fun. When it comes to animation, things don't have to be as they are in reality, for example: a hare moving a few millimeters between photos will move very slowly in the final result of your short film. On the contrary, a turtle that advances a few centimeters between shots, will then seem to run very fast.

What you have to do, after all, is let your imagination run wild and have fun creating the situations you like best.

Enjoy it!



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